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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

2 April 1963

SUBJECT: Chinese Communist Ground Threat Against India (Draft for Panel)

I. GENERAL

1. With 2.6 million men the Chinese Communist army is the second largest, after that of the USSR, in the world, and has been proven, under certain circumstances, to be an effective fighting force. There are several factors, however, which we believe are causing the Chinese Communist leaders concern as to the ability of their armed forces adequately to support China's foreign policies. Now virtually without supply and support from the USSR, obsolescence and wear and tear has caused a decline in the effectiveness of the army's equipment and weapons. We believe that China's industry cannot produce enough of the heavier and more complex equipment -- notably aircraft and naval ships and possibly armored fighting vehicles -- to maintain equipment at present levels. Peiping also probably sees several situations,

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in addition to the border dispute with India, as requiring a high level of effective military preparedness: i.e., the situations in Laos, Vietnam, the Taiwan Strait and North Korea. Even the Sino-Soviet dispute will probably place additional demands on Chinese military dispositions and capabilities, since one of the attributes of China's new "independence" from the USSR will be the need to watch over, more closely than to date, the long China-USSR border.

2. China's troop dispositions are directed toward coastal and border defense. A secondary mission for all units is internal security, and, in some areas, such as Tibet, this function has been the main occupation of the units stationed there. Of China's 34 armies,* 8 are located within the area adjacent to Korea, 5 are adjacent to or flanking the Taiwan Strait, 4 occupy the Southeast Asian border area and 11 are deployed in reserve in North and East-Central China. Less than five percent of the Chinese army's ground strength is located in the western half of the country. Forces in Tibet are composed of . . .

* The Chinese Communist "army" resembles in size a US corps, its basic tactical components consisting of three infantry divisions.

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3. A major offensive effort against India would require the redeployment of several divisions from elsewhere, but Chinese Communist troop strength is more than sufficient to augment forces in Tibet to and beyond the numbers that could be supported by present logistic capabilities. In the area bordering the frontier area the Chinese could support a maximum of 200,000 men or 165,000 combat troops in attacks across the frontier. The maximum number of combat troops which could be supported in those areas from which the major attacks against India and the Himalayan border states might come is approximately 120,000.

II. MAIN TRANSPORTATION ROUTES INTO THE TIBET-SINKIANG AREA

4. Supplies for Chinese Communist military forces in southwest Sinkiang and Tibet are transported by road from rail-served base depots at Chengtu in Szechwan, Lanchou in Kansu and Urumchi in Sinkiang. The facilities at these railheads are ample for supporting the maximum forces deployable in the Sino-Indian border area.

5. From the Chengtu transshipment point supplies are delivered to Changtu via the Szechwan-Tibet highway. The Changtu depots support forces located in eastern Tibet and along the frontier from Lima west to Milin. From Lanchou supplies are moved over the

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Tsinghai-Tibet road to the Nagchhu Dzong distribution depot serving west, central, and southern Tibet. From the Urumchi railhead goods move by road to a supply base at Kashgar and from there to units in the Yarkand and Ladakh areas. The Kashgar base probably also gives some support to troops located in extreme western Tibet.

6. Under optimum conditions a total of 2,000 tons per day could be delivered to the military sub-districts in southwest Sinkiang and Tibet. This tonnage, however, is unlikely to be achieved during all periods of the year because of climatic factors. Therefore, it is estimated that the maximum sustained tonnage deliverable to supply distribution points in Tibet and southwest Sinkiang is 1,600 tons per day.

III. CLIMATE, TACTICS AND EQUIPMENT

7. Although severe winter weather is an important factor in the conduct of military operations along the Sino-Indian border, low temperature and snow in themselves are unlikely completely to prohibit activity. More serious problems arise from melting snow and ice and heavier precipitation in spring and summer. Mid-October to mid-December is the most favorable period for operations all along the border and road conditions will be at their maximum capacity during this time of the year.

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8. In the western half of the frontier, which encompasses Ladakh, the high central Tibetan plateau and most of Nepal, the spring is a difficult season because melting snows make streams unfordable and flat-floored valleys are often flooded. The summer in this sector is generally favorable for operations except in the area of southwest Kashmir which adjoins Ladakh where the southwest monsoon causes landslides and swollen streams. From December to March temperatures are severely low and winds, occasionally reaching gale force, not only make the cold difficult to endure but also fill the air with fine penetrating dust. Snowstorms and blizzards are frequent, especially in the mountains.

9. In the eastern segment of the frontier, extending from eastern Nepal through Sikkim, Bhutan and Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) and including Lhasa to the north and a narrow belt of the Brahmaputra River valley to the south, road conditions during the spring months of April and May will be fair. Flooding, unfordable streams and landslides may obstruct routes for short periods, however. June to September are the worst months for operations in the eastern segment of the frontier. Roads in the Brahmaputra Valley and in the Lhasa area may be flooded and in NEFA the southwest monsoon will reduce road capacities to a minimum.

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10. In the Himalayan region the physiographic effects on operations are enormous, and the harsh environment requires modifications in organization, equipment and tactics. The use of trucks, armor and artillery is limited by the inadequate road network and is adversely affected by the climate. Maintenance problems are also increased. Troops tire easily, combat loads must be reduced and daily march times and distances must be shortened. The use of motor transport elements is drastically curtailed and the use of animal and human transport is relied upon heavily. Logistics, communications and the control of large units in coordinated operations are difficult.

11. Tactical movements require more detailed preparations than those at lower elevations. Reconnaissance and security on the march require special attention. Tactical operations will rarely take place at an echelon above that of the regiment. The regiment and the battalion are the units usually employed along a single axis against a single tactical objective. Operations are characterized by infiltration, ambushes, wide flanking movements, meeting engagements and sudden concentrations for specific missions. Secrecy and speed of movement are sought by every possible means.

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12. The standard organization of the Chinese Communist infantry division has been modified to conform to the decentralized operational requirements of mountain operations. The largest artillery piece employed under normal circumstances probably would be the 122mm howitzer. However, in the recent fighting on the border the Chinese used 120-mm mortars, 76.2mm mountain guns and recoilless rifles. Although tanks have been reported in Ladakh and in the Chumbi Valley, there is no evidence that the Chinese have large numbers of tanks in Tibet. It is believed that only in an attack through Sikkim could tanks be employed in other than an assault artillery role.

13. The Chinese could employ airborne forces to seize an airfield required for resupply of advancing ground forces, or to prevent Indian redeployment, or to leap-frog Indian defensive positions. We estimate that not more than two battalions could be dropped in a single lift. Airborne troops could be staged at airfields at . . .

IV. LIKELY AVENUES OF ATTACK

14. Although the maximum number of ground forces that the Chinese could employ and support logistically in simultaneous

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attacks all along the Sino-Indian border is estimated to be 165,000, we believe that the areas from which the main attacks against India and the Himalayan border states might come where a maximum force of 120,000 men could be put into action. This force would consist of 5 light infantry divisions, 14 infantry regiments, and 2 airborne battalions.

15. These attacks, we believe, would have the following military objectives:

a. In Ladakh an extension of Chinese control to include the capture of the important communications center of Leh.

b. In the border area between Ladakh and Nepal to seize the Chinese [Milang] territorial [salient] claim in the Bara Hoti area which would be a psychological threat to New Delhi.

c. In Nepal to facilitate the eventual occupation of the country by seizure of the major valley approaches and the city of Katmandu.

d. In the East the effective occupation of the NEFA and that part of Assem north of the Brahmaputra River. To accomplish this objective the Chinese could either temporarily

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occupy the key communications centers of Siliguri or Hasimara, or effect a strong lodgement in the Gauhati area. Of the two, we believe that the Chinese would choose to establish the Gauhati salient because it would not only effectively deny the Indians eastward communications and at the same time greatly assist the Chinese advances into central and eastern NEFA, but also would be militarily the easier and less costly venture.

A. In the West

16. Ladakh. In Ladakh the Chinese Communists completed a road from Sinkiang in 1957. From this road, they have constructed a number of feeder roads, including one in the west that roughly parallels the main road, which permit the movement of troops and supplies to outposts. In many places the valleys provide natural roadbeds that require little construction or maintenance to be made useable for motor transport. The approach routes from Ladakh converge on Leh across the Karakoram and Ladakh Ranges; through the Saser Pass (17,480 feet) to Panamik from the north and via Chushul and Shyok from the southeast. Of these, the latter, a motorable route, is by far the more favorable avenue of approach. From Leh the road twists across two great mountain ranges to Srinagar, the major Indian military base in Kashmir.

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17. The road network leading from Sinkinag and western Tibet into Ladakh will support an estimated seven light infantry divisions. This capability exists for operations within Ladakh and north of the frontier; for operations into Indian territory, however, this support capability drops to pack trails. Therefore, the magnitude of the Chinese threat in this region is limited by the logistic difficulties that would be encountered in Indian territory, rather than by the number of troops that could be concentrated and supported on the Chinese side of the frontier.

18. After several months of stockpiling and troop reinforcement operations, the Chinese could launch the following attacks in the Ladakh area:

a. One infantry regiment could move through the Saser Pass to Panamik (120 miles), but since the pass is closed from December to May, the resupply of this regiment during the winter months would have to be accomplished by air drop or by road from Chusul.

b. Given sufficient engineer support for road improvement, one light infantry division could be supported from the Chusul area, with two regiments advancing to Leh (120 miles) and one

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regiment supporting the northern thrust to Panamik by advancing up the Shyok River Valley to the area of Tirit (140 miles).

c. Because of logistic limitations and the need to improve road systems as they advance, Chinese military objectives would probably be limited to an extension of their control of the Ladakh area to include the capture of the key communications center of Leh. We do not believe that the Chinese, in their initial attack, could advance beyond Leh.

19. The Border Passes Between Ladakh and Nepal. Along the border between the Chusul area in southern Ladakh and Nepal there are several passes through which Chinese forces could attack. Of these, the best avenues of approach, although they are narrow defiles subject to blockage by snow during the winter months, are through Shipki Pass (15,400 feet elevation), Manu Pass (17,890 feet elevation), Niti Pass (16,600 feet elevation), and Lipulek/
Pass (17,900 feet).

20. During the period June to September, two infantry regiments could be supported in an advance through Shipki Pass to the vicinity of Chini (45 miles). Not more than three regiments through Manu and Niti Passes to Josimath (approximately 45 miles); and one regiment through Lipulek Pass to the general area of Dharchula (20 miles). Advances beyond Chini, Josimath and Dharchula

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could not be logistically supported until the Chinese had improved the existing trails to at least one-ton capacities. Further, we believe that because the Chinese would be unable to re-supply by air during the winter months, the regiments would be forced to withdraw north of the passes.

21. Nepal. The Chinese have built roads to within a few miles of the Sino-Nepalese border opposite the five major entry routes and they have good lateral communications along the entire frontier from the Shigatse-Gartok road east to Tingri Dzong. Trails lead from these roads to all the passes, many of which are open for much of the winter. The Chinese are now building a road which approaches the frontier and which will eventually lead to Katmandu.

22. It is estimated that the Chinese could air drop up to two battalions to seize the Katmandu airfield, and could then within five to seven days air land up to one lightly-equipped infantry division. They could support this force by air indefinitely, provided they retained tactical air superiority in the area. We estimate that by the utilization of pack animals and the mobilization of all available Tibetan and Nepalese porters the Chinese could support attacks by one infantry regiment through each

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of the following passes: through Naralagna Pass to Bajang; through Kore La Pass to Dana; through Kyrlong La Pass to Nawakot; through Kodari Pass to Thulikhel; and through Rakha La Pass to Dingla.

23. We estimate that the Chinese could not occupy Nepal up to the Indian frontier, and their tenure of northern Nepal would be entirely dependent on stockpiling, their ability to sustain portage operations through the northern passes, and the retention of air supremacy over the Katmandu area.

B. In the East

24. In the Sikkim-Bhutan-NEFA sector of the frontier region, the Chinese, had they had the opportunity to stockpile supplies and complete troop reinforcement of the forward border areas, could launch the following initial attacks over existing roads and trails: either two light infantry divisions to Gangtok; or, one light infantry division to Rharo Dzong; or, two infantry regiments to Bhuntsi Dzong and two infantry regiments to Tashigang Dzong; or, one infantry division to Tezpur. In addition they could move two infantry regiments 30 miles south of the frontier at Longju and one light infantry division to Tepang.

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25. Because of limitations of supplies available in the area south of Lhasa and between the Chumbi Valley and Bum La, we do not believe that military operations could be supported simultaneously in both Sikkim and the eastern Bhutan-western NEFA area.

26. Subsequent to road improvements the Chinese could continue their attacks as follows: either three light infantry divisions and two standard divisions (with armor) to Siliguri; or, one light infantry division to Hasimara; or, two light infantry divisions to Gauhati; or, one light infantry division to Tezpur. In addition the Chinese could deploy two infantry regiments 30 miles south of the frontier to Longju and one light infantry division to Balamaghani.

27. The details of these possible thrusts are presented in the paragraphs which follow.

28. The Sikkim Area. There are two converging avenues of approach from the Chumbi Valley through Sikkim to Siliguri. One, a motorable road, leads through Natu Pass (14,500 feet) via Gangtok and Kalimpong; the other, an unimproved road, crosses the frontier through Jelep Pass joining the former at Kalimpong.

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29. We estimate that the Chinese could attack through the Natu and Jelep Passes with two light infantry divisions and advance to Gangtok (34 miles) without improving the roads. If the road capacities between the frontier and Gangtok were increased, which would require an estimated 6 to 10 weeks, a total of three light infantry divisions and two standard infantry divisions with armor could be supported in an advance to Siliguri (100 miles). In the initial attack up to two airborne battalions could be dropped in rear of the forward Indian defensive positions.

30. If prepared to violate Bhutanese neutrality, the Chinese could turn the established Indian defensive positions in Sikkim by making an initial attack down the Torsa River Valley which generally parallels the north-south orientation of the western Bhutan border.

31. Overland logistic support of a force in the Siliguri area during the winter months would be extremely difficult, and unless stocks of supplies were captured or airfields secured to support air lift operations a withdrawal to the Darjeeling area and a reduction in strength to not more than one division would be necessary.

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32. Western Bhutan. An undeveloped trail goes from Phari Dzong in Tibet through western Bhutan and joins the road connecting Pharo Dzong and Hasimara. We estimate that the Chinese could advance to Pharo Dzong with one division without improving the trail. If the trail were improved to permit the movement of 3-ton vehicles, this division could be supported in an advance to Hasimara. Overland logistic support of this division in the Hasimara area during the winter would be possible provided stockpiling were carried out promptly. We estimate that the Chinese could employ up to two airborne battalions to seize the airfield at Hasimara at the same time that the infantry division moved out of the Himalayan foothills.

33. Eastern Bhutan and Western NEFA. The construction and maintenance of roads in the frontier area of NEFA have been hampered by rugged terrain and heavy rainfall. The most highly developed network in the vicinity is in Tibet, and the relatively good logistical system supporting the western sector of NEFA is reflected in the number of troops the Chinese deployed during the recent fighting.

34. There are two converging routes which cross Bhutan and form an approach to Assam: one from Lhakhang Dzong to Gauhati via

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Lhuntsi Dzong and Dewangiri; the other from Bum La to Gauhati via Towang, Tashigang Dzong and Dewangiri. In northwest NEFA there is a motorable road which connects Bum La with Tezpur and which passes through Towang and Bomdi La.

35. In an advance through Bhutan the Chinese initially could support two infantry regiments at Tashigang Dzong (50 miles), and two infantry regiments at Lhuntsi Dzong (30 miles). After road improvements, the Chinese could maintain three light infantry divisions within Bhutan, or could advance to Gauhati (145 miles) with at least two divisions. The Chinese could drop two airborne battalions at the northern end of the Gauhati bridge, to destroy the bridge and delay Indian reinforcement. We estimate that, if the Chinese were to repeat their attack from Bum La to Bomdi La (90 miles) they could support two light infantry divisions at Bomdi La and another division at Tezpur.

36. Central and Eastern NEFA. There are two avenues of approach across the McMahon Line into NEFA: in central NEFA from the border town of Longju south through the Subansiri River Valley; and in eastern NEFA from Lima through the Lohit River Valley via Walong.

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37. A penetration in the central NEFA sector would be restricted to a distance over which porter supply lines could be operated. We estimate that, at a maximum, the Chinese could support two regiments in the Subansiri River Valley up to 30 miles south of the border. In the eastern part of the NEFA the Chinese could initially support an attack by one light infantry division in the Lohit River Valley as far west as Tepang. Subsequent to the development of a road to Tepang, which would require an estimated 8 to 10 weeks, the Chinese could support up to three light infantry divisions in this area and advance to Balamaghani with one division.

38. We estimate that the objective of a major attack in the East would be to disrupt Indian communications with Assam either by seizing the important communications centers of Siliguri or Hasimara, or by establishing a salient in the area of Gauhati north of the Brahmaputra River. If the Chinese could improve the roads through Bhutan with sufficient speed to sustain their attack to Gauhati, they probably could stockpile sufficient supplies in this salient to support their troops throughout the winter period.

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